

1 TIMOTHY

**The First Letter of Paul
to Timothy**

In the introduction to the Pastoral Letters, which prefaces the Introduction to Paul's Letter to Titus, I explained that, while it is possible that this sub-group of Pauline letters was composed by a disciple of Paul, the case against Paul himself being the author is not conclusive. Once we accept the specific and limited aim of this letter, there is no reason not to read this as a letter from Paul to Timothy. Attempts to locate it in the period prior to Paul's imprisonment in Rome are unsatisfactory. I assume, therefore, that the tradition is correct which states that Paul was released after his two years in Rome, that he headed back east, and that he wrote this letter some time between his release in 62AD and his martyrdom, which is traditionally dated in 67AD.

Whereas the letter to Titus is concerned with the smaller and less organised Jewish-Christian communities on Crete, this letter is concerned with the larger, mostly Gentile, communities in the Roman province of Asia. Granted that Ephesus was the centre of Paul's missionary activity for so long, the lack of personal detail and reference to shared experiences is at first surprising. However, as noted in the Introduction to the Pastoral Letters, the limited aim of the letter is adequate explanation of its more formal, less personal, tone. The persecution of Christians under Nero in 64AD and the deteriorating relationship between Rome and the Jews in Palestine (perhaps even the outbreak of the war in 66AD) made life significantly more dangerous for Christians in the Empire. Here, as in his letter to Titus, Paul's focus is on supporting Timothy in strengthening the organisation of the church to help it survive in troubled times. Though addressed to Timothy, it is not intended as a personal letter. Paul is laying down some basic principles that he hopes will help the community when he is no longer around to support them.

Paul and Timothy

Timothy is from Lystra in Lycaonia in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia. Paul visited Lystra twice on his missionary journey with Barnabas c.47-48AD (Acts 14:6,21). When Paul returned to Lystra in 49AD, he met up with 'a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek' (Acts 16:1). Timothy accompanied Paul to Philippi and Thessalonica and was with Paul in Corinth 51-52AD (Acts 18:5). The letters written from Corinth to Thessalonica both bear his name. Paul refers to him as 'our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ' (1Thessalonians 3:2).

He was with Paul during Paul's three-year mission in Ephesus 52-55AD. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, written from Ephesus, Paul mentions that he has sent Timothy, 'my beloved and faithful child in the Lord' to Corinth (4:17). He asks the Corinthians to welcome him and to send him back to Paul at Ephesus (16:10). The letter to Philemon and the letter to the Colossians, which were in all likelihood written from Ephesus, include Timothy's name in the address. Before leaving Ephesus, Paul sent Timothy on ahead to Macedonia (see Acts 19:22), and they were together in Macedonia when Paul wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians (see 2Corinthians 1:1). Timothy was in Corinth with Paul when the letter to the Romans was written in early 57AD (Romans 16:21). He accompanied Paul on his journey from Corinth to Macedonia in 57AD as part of the group that was taking the collection to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4).

Luke makes no mention of Timothy when he recounts Paul's capture in Jerusalem, his detention in Caesarea or the sea voyage from Caesarea to Rome. However, if, as seems likely, Paul composed his letter to the Philippians while in Rome, Timothy was with him there (1:1). Paul mentions that he hopes to send Timothy to Philippi (2:19). he adds:

I have no one like him ... His worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

– Philippians 2:20,22

Having returned east after his release, Paul is concerned to see that the churches are securely established. Part of his strategy was to put Timothy, his most trusted co-worker, in Ephesus. Erroneous teaching was disrupting the community and jeopardising its mission. By means of this letter, Paul is using his authority to tell the churches in Ephesus that he expects them to follow Timothy's leadership, and to expect from Timothy the instructions contained in the letter. We are aware throughout the letter of Paul's concern for the integrity of the gospel which he has been commissioned to proclaim. We are also aware of Paul's conviction that nothing must be permitted to endanger the mission of the church which is to proclaim this gospel to the whole world. The vanity and folly of a group of misguided teachers cannot be allowed to divide 'the household of God'.

First Timothy, along with Titus and Second Timothy, is absent from P⁴⁶. This could be explained by the loss of the final pages. More surprisingly, the Pastoral Epistles are absent from the Codex Vaticanus and are not included by Marcion in his canon (c.150AD). They are found intact in the other major codexes, including the Codex Sinaiticus of the fourth century and the Codex Alexandrinus of the fifth century.

The Structure of 1Timothy

Paul greets Timothy	1:1-2
Part One: Timothy is to see that teaching is based on the gospel	
1. He must correct those teaching error	1:3-7
2. A proper understanding of the purpose of the law	1:8-11
3. Paul's apostolic commission is to proclaim that Christ came to save sinners. Paul himself is an example	1:12-17
4. Timothy's task and the connection between faith and behaviour	1:18-20
Part Two: Regulations governing the assembly and its leaders	
1. Prayer in the assembly	
a. They are to pray for everyone because God wills to save all	2:1-7
b. Directions for the men	2:8
c. Directions for the women	2:9-15
2. Regulations governing leaders	
a. Qualities expected of bishops	3:1-7
b. Qualities expected of deacons	3:8-13
Part Three: Paul's expectations of Timothy	
1. The purpose of the letter explained	3:14-15
2. the 'mystery of religion' and some errors regarding it	3:16 - 4:5
3. Timothy as a teacher	4:6-16
Part Four: How Timothy is to deal with special groups	
1. The widows who should be listed for community support	5:1-16
2. Matters concerning the behaviour of elders	5:17-25
3. The behaviour expected of slaves	6:1-2
Part Five: Concluding instructions	
1. Paul returns to the subject of heterodox teaching and warns about the temptation of wealth	6:2-10
2. Personal advice to Timothy	6:11-16
3. Instructions to the wealthy	6:17-19
4. Final advice and blessing	6:20-21

The liturgical readings

	1:1-2,12-14	23rd Friday of Ordinary Time Year I
	1:3-11	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
1:12-17		24th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C
	1:15-17	23rd Saturday of Ordinary Time Year I
	1:18-20	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
2:1-8		25th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C and 24th Monday Year I
	2:9-15	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
	3:1-13	24th Tuesday of Ordinary Time Year I
	3:14-16	24th Wednesday of ordinary Time Year I
	4:1-11	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
	4:12-16	24th Thursday of Ordinary Time Year I
	5:1-25	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
	6:1	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary
	6:2-12	24th Friday of Ordinary Time Year I
6:11-16		26th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year C
	6:13-16	24th Saturday of Ordinary Time Year I
	6:17-21	not in the Sunday or weekday lectionary

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope,

²To Timothy, my true [NRSV 'loyal'] child in the faith:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul refers to himself, as always, by his Roman family name (see page 11). He is writing to his closest co-missionary, but it is not a friendly, personal letter. Rather, he is writing to Timothy precisely in Timothy's role as the leader of the church in Ephesus. As the plural 'you' in the final blessing indicates (see 6:21), he intends this letter to be a public statement of certain principles that should govern the life of the Christian communities under Timothy's jurisdiction. He wants the communities to be in no doubt of the fact that Timothy has Paul's personal backing in the important and difficult responsibility that he has undertaken at Paul's request. He is writing by virtue of the apostolic commission given him by Christ, and so he adds 'an apostle of Jesus Christ'. Since he is acting in obedience to 'the command of God', he expects his words to be taken as the word of God.

As in his letter to Titus, he refers to God as 'our Saviour' (see the commentary on Titus 1:4). Salvation is to be a major theme of the letter. There is a close connection between salvation and hope (see the commentary on Galatians 5:5). Jesus is our hope. It is he who revealed to us God's will to draw us all into full communion of love in a life that transcends death, a communion which he himself is now enjoying. Furthermore, the communion which we now have with him is a pledge that we will one day join him in glory. We recall Paul's words to the Colossians: 'God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (1:27).

We detailed the relationship between Paul and Timothy in the Introduction to this letter. Paul refers to Timothy in terms that are identical with those used of Titus (see Titus 1:4). More than affection is being expressed. He is stating for all to hear that the faith that is proclaimed by Timothy is the faith that is proclaimed by Paul. For a reflection on 'faith', see the commentary on Galatians 2:16. As in his letter to Titus, and for the same reasons, when Paul speaks of 'faith' in this letter he tends to put the accent on what is to be believed (see the commentary on Titus 1:1).

Apart from one element, Paul's greeting is typical. We refer the reader to the commentary on Galatians 1:1-3 for a reflection on 'grace' and 'peace', and on the significance in referring to God as 'Father' and to Jesus as 'Christ'. The one special feature here is the inclusion of 'mercy', a word which speaks of the ways in which God shows his gracious care. It speaks also of God's fidelity to love, and of the intimate communion to which he calls us (see the commentary on Ephesians 2:4). By introducing 'mercy' here, Paul is preparing us to expect mercy to be a major theme of his letter.

The absence of the customary thanksgiving after the address is a further indication that this letter is not intended as a personal one, but as a set of official instructions. It is seven or so years since Paul gave his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus (see Acts 20:15-38), and Paul is concerned that a group of Jewish Christians have been disrupting the faith of the Christians in the area by ‘teaching a different doctrine’ (Greek: *heterodidaskaleō*, whence ‘heterodox’). As he will go on to explain, he is referring to teaching that is against ‘sound teaching’ (1:10), which is to say that it is not in conformity with ‘the gospel’ (1:11). In ‘urging’ (*parakaleō*) Timothy to remain in Ephesus and to use his authority to control those who are teaching error, Paul is conveying to Timothy the call (*kaleō*) of the risen Christ (see the commentary on 1Thessalonians 2:12).

Paul’s description of the erroneous teaching echoes his concerns in his letter to Titus in which he also speaks of ‘myths’ (Titus 1:14) and ‘genealogies’ (Titus 3:9). We refer the reader to the commentary on these texts in which we reflect on the Jewish context that gave rise to these ‘speculations’. The focus of teaching in the Christian community should be on what Paul calls here the plan (Greek: *oikonomia*) of God. Instead of indulging in the kinds of distraction and fanciful embellishments on the Bible narratives that we find, for example, in many of the Jewish writings of the period, and instead of attempting to work out who is saved and who is not saved by trying to establish one’s links with Israel and the families to whom God made his promises, people should be focusing on what God has revealed through Christ about his plan of salvation: ‘the plan (*oikonomia*) of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things’ (Ephesians 3:9); ‘the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ as a plan (*oikonomia*) for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him’ (Ephesians 1:9-10).

This alone is what matters, and it is something that can be grasped only ‘by faith’, not by endless speculations based on manipulation and fanciful embellishments of biblical texts. What it means to know something by faith is explained by Paul in the following verses in which he offers a rich definition of the true goal of Christian teaching.

³I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus

so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine,

⁴and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the plan of God [NRSV ‘divine training’] that is known by faith.

⁵But the aim of such instruction is love

that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

⁶Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk,

⁷desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

Instruction that does not lead to ‘love’ is ‘meaningless talk’. Paul can write in this way because of his own experience of being loved by Christ. Thirty years of missionary endeavour have only deepened his conviction that ‘the only thing that counts is faith working through love’ (Galatians 5:6). I offered an initial reflection on ‘love’ in the commentary on Galatians 5:6. The reader may also like to read the commentary on 1 Corinthians 13. Paul never tires of advising us to ‘live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Ephesians 5:2). Verse five is a brief but rich statement of the garden of the soul in which alone love can flower.

As for Jesus, so for Paul, love is a matter of the ‘heart’. Its roots find nourishment only from the very centre of our being. True love can flow only to the extent that our heart is pure, for true love is the essence of the very being of God. Indeed, ‘blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God’ (Matthew 5:8). True love – the love which is the goal of Christ-centred instruction – is experienced only in the communion with God which is poured into our hearts by the Spirit of the risen Christ (Romans 5:5). For it is a communion in the love that binds Jesus to the Father. It is true love that we are all seeking, and we will find it only to the extent that we find God, or rather that we allow ourselves to be found by God: ‘you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul’ (Deuteronomy 4:29). We pray: ‘Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me’ (Psalm 51:10).

The emphasis on truth, on ‘sound doctrine’, causes Paul to add ‘good conscience’, for the heart can be distracted, deceived and corrupted by error. Good teaching is essential if we are to learn to discern between impulses that are superficial, distracting and distorting, and impulses that truly come from our deepest centre where we are in touch with the divine Spirit. Hence the importance of faith that is ‘sincere’ (*anupokritos*). Faith can be ‘hypocritical’. It can be worn like a mask. Genuine faith flows from contemplation of the love of God revealed in the heart of Jesus in his self-giving on the cross. Genuine faith purifies the heart, clarifies the judgment and bears fruit in love. All else is ‘meaningless’ (compare Titus 1:10; 3:9). The false teachers fancy themselves as being teachers of God’s revelation and God’s will as expressed in the scriptures, but in deviating from love and from the life of true faith, they show that they ‘know neither the scriptures nor the power of God’ (Matthew 22:29).

Those who are responsible for ‘teaching a different doctrine’ (1:3) claim to be ‘teachers of the law’ (1:7). Elsewhere, Paul has presented Christ and his revelation of the truth about God as the goal to which the law was directed. To take one’s eyes off Christ, to deviate from love, and to waste energy in speculations that go nowhere is to demonstrate precisely what Paul has just claimed: that they do not understand ‘either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions’ (1:7).

‘The law is good’ (Romans 7:12,16). It is an expression, however partial and imperfect, of God’s self-revelation. Paul, the Jew, has the greatest respect for it. It shows us in what way our behaviour is contrary to God’s will. But, unlike ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ (Romans 8:2), it does not of itself liberate us from sin’s dominion; it does not enable us to live in accordance with God’s will. However, it does point us towards the one who can liberate us, Jesus. Furthermore, it still has a role to play in pointing out sin. We are not meant, however, to distract ourselves by focusing on the details of the law that have been transcended by the full self-revelation of God in Jesus. For those engaged in sin such as Paul describes here, the law can help. For the ‘righteous’ (Greek: *dikaïos*), for those who are doing God’s will by living a life of love ‘from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith’ (1:5), teaching should focus on contemplation of Jesus, and not focus on the law as though it had not reached its goal in him.

In listing types of sinners, Paul follows closely the pattern of the Ten Commandments. The first three commandments of the law refer to our behaviour in relation to God. Deuteronomy 5:1-7 tells us to listen to the God who liberated Israel from Egypt and to have no gods other than him; Paul speaks of those who are ‘lawless’ (*anomos*) and ‘insubordinate’ (*anupotaktos*, ‘rejecting their right place in the divine order’). Deuteronomy 5:8-11 tells us not to worship images of God or to use his name in vain; Paul speaks of the ‘godless’ (*asebēs*, see the commentary on Titus 1:1) and ‘sinful’ (*hamartōlos*). Deuteronomy 5:12-15 tells us to observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy; Paul speaks of the ‘unholy’ (*anosios*, ‘those who have no respect for the sacred’), and the ‘profane’ (*bebelos*).

Sin against the fourth commandment, ‘Honour your father and your mother’ (Deuteronomy 5:16), is expressed in its extreme, negative form as ‘those who kill their father or mother’, or perhaps metaphorically, those who smite their parents by total disregard for their authority. This is followed by the fifth commandment, ‘You shall not murder’ (Deuteronomy 5:17).

⁸Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately.

⁹This means understanding that the law is laid down

not for the righteous [NRSV ‘innocent’]

but for the lawless and insubordinate [NRSV ‘disobedient’],

for the godless and sinful,

for the unholy and profane,

for those who kill their father or mother,

for murderers

Behaviour that is contrary to the gospel

¹⁰fornicators,
sodomites,
slave traders,
liars,
perjurers,
and whatever else
is contrary to the
sound teaching
¹¹that conforms to
the glorious gospel
of the blessed God,
which he entrusted
to me.

Paul refers to the sixth commandment, ‘You shall not commit adultery’ (Deuteronomy 5:18), by listing those who indulge in irresponsible heterosexual and homosexual behaviour. For the meaning of ‘sodomites’ (*arsenokoitēs*) and a study of Paul’s attitude to homosexuality, see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:9.

The seventh commandment, ‘You shall not steal’ (Deuteronomy 5:19) is interpreted also in its worst manifestation: ‘slave traders’ (see the condemnation in Deuteronomy 24:7).

The eighth commandment against perjury follows: ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour’ (Deuteronomy 5:20).

The ninth and tenth commandments look back over human sin and focus on the source, which is distorted desire. In the present text, as in Romans 13:9, Paul stays with external, observable sinful behaviour. The law points to such behaviour and condemns it in God’s name. So does ‘sound teaching that conforms to the gospel’. The law has reached its goal in the gospel. Paul’s point is that Timothy is to insist that those teaching in the Christian community focus on sound, wholesome, teaching (compare Titus 1:9; 2:1) which is based on what God has revealed in Jesus and is proclaimed in the gospel entrusted to Paul. As he wrote to the Romans: ‘love is the fulfilling of the law’ (Romans 13:10).

Paul describes the gospel as ‘the gospel of the glory of the blessed God’. ‘Glorious gospel’ is one possible translation, but in the context Paul seems to be saying more, as in his words to the Corinthians:

It is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’
who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowl-
edge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

– 2 Corinthians 4:6

The gospel is about Jesus ‘in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell’ (Colossians 1:19). Jesus is the radiant splendour of God’s being, manifesting God’s love, and calling forth praise and thanksgiving (‘blessing’) from all creatures, for the provident love of our ‘blessed’ (*makarios*) God’. This gospel has been entrusted to Paul. Paul has authorised Timothy to be the leader of the community in Ephesus. Timothy is to insist that those teaching in the community conform their teaching to the gospel proclaimed by Paul.

Paul is expressing his gratitude to Christ. In doing so he speaks of Jesus as ‘our Lord’, thereby focusing attention in a special way on Jesus as the one through whom God exercises his power to save. He also uses an aorist participle from the verb *endunamoō* (to ‘strengthen’). The fact that he uses a participle means that he keeps the focus on Christ as the one doing the strengthening, and does not shift it to himself as the one being strengthened. The aorist participle is the simplest participle form, lacking any specific nuance, including a temporal one. It is often best translated in English by a present form. These considerations encourage a translation like ‘the source of my strength’.

Paul is grateful that Christ judged him *pistos*. As was demonstrated when reflecting on ‘faith’ in the commentary on Galatians 2:16, *pistos* can mean ‘trustworthy’, ‘believing’ or ‘faithful’. In the light of Paul’s use of *pisteuō* in the previous verse when speaking of ‘the gospel which he entrusted to me’, ‘trustworthy’ seems to be the intended meaning here. Paul hopes to be faithful, but he marvels at the fact that Christ chose to trust him with the commission of proclaiming the gospel. He speaks of himself as being in the ‘service’ (*diakonia*) of Christ, for he has been chosen to carry out a divine service as Christ’s ambassador (see the commentary on 1 Corinthians 3:5). Timothy, too, is a ‘servant’ (*diakonos*) of Christ (see 4:6).

In what is perhaps his earliest extant letter, Paul wrote: ‘You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it’ (Galatians 1:13). It is a subject that he comes back to a number of times. Here he speaks of himself as a ‘blasphemer’, not in the sense that he took God’s name in vain, but in the sense that he was insulting God by contravening God’s will. He came to see his brash, youthful, zeal as arrogant (*hubristēs*). He was so sure of himself that he neglected to listen for God’s inspiration.

His heart goes out in gratitude to Christ who showed him mercy (*eleeō*). We are beginning to see why Paul included ‘mercy’ in his address (see 1:2). Paul is not saying that Christ would not have shown him mercy if his persecution were not out of ignorance. He is simply stating the fact that he did act ignorantly and in unbelief. As a Pharisee he thought he knew, but he did not. He thought he was being zealous for the faith, but all the time was acting out of the lack of it.

¹²I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, the source of my strength

[NRSV ‘who has strengthened me’],
that [NRSV ‘because’]
he judged me trustworthy
[NRSV ‘faithful’]
and appointed me to his service,

¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer,
a persecutor,
an arrogant man.
[NRSV ‘and a man of violence’]

But I received mercy for I had acted ignorantly in unbelief

¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the foremost.

¹⁶But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.

¹⁷To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Behind verse fourteen stands not only Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, but a lifetime of intimacy with Christ through more than thirty years of committed service as an apostle. It has been a life of faith, a life of love, and Paul knows that it is not his faith and his love that has carried him through the years. God graciously poured into Paul's heart the very faith and love of Jesus himself: 'it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me' (Galatians 2:20). All of this and more is captured in one of Paul's favourite expressions, 'in Christ Jesus' (see the commentary on Romans 8:1-2). Paul stresses the abundant overflowing, of grace in typical Pauline fashion, by prefixing '*huper*' to the verb *pleonazō* ('to fill up') – 'grace overflowed' (*huperpleonazō*).

In verse fifteen, he solemnly introduces what appears to have been part of a creedal formula: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'. The gospels record Jesus as saying: 'I have come to call not the righteous but sinners' (Mark 2:17), and 'the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost' (Luke 19:10). When Paul wrote to the Romans: 'God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us' (Romans 8:6), he was writing from his own personal experience. Likewise when he wrote: 'where sin increased, grace abounded all the more' (Romans 5:20).

Paul is saying that he is living proof of the truth of this saying. If God has shown such mercy to him in spite of the gravity of his sin, no one need feel excluded from God's love. He stresses God's 'patience' (*makrothumia*, see 1 Corinthians 13:4). God's love is 'long-suffering'. At the same time, being love, it is not thrust upon us, but requires our welcome in faith. This is something stressed by Paul when he writes: 'Do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and *patience*? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?' (Romans 2:4). The memory of such superabundant love draws from Paul a prayer of praise.

Though he is addressing Timothy, Paul is writing for the community. He wants to remind them of the divine origin of Timothy's call and of the authority which he exercises among them, in accordance with which Timothy is to act against those responsible for heterodox teaching. As in the address, 'my child' is more than an indication of affection. It is a statement of solidarity. Timothy's authority has Paul's backing.

Paul refers to 'prophecies made earlier about you'. We can perhaps find a parallel in his own experience as recalled by Luke. Having spoken of Paul's ministry in Antioch, Luke continues;

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'

– Acts 13:2

Timothy's calling, and perhaps even his position of leadership in Ephesus, was something that was discerned in prayer. He and the community can be confident that it is an expression of God's will as revealed through certain Christian prophets.

In the context of having to oppose false teaching, Paul uses one of his favourite metaphors, likening the ministry to a military campaign:

We live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.

– 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

Timothy is to have 'faith and a good conscience', for it is these, as Paul has already stated (see 1:5) that support love, and it is love alone that gives the power of the Spirit to whatever means Timothy uses against the enemies of the truth. If the methods chosen by Timothy lack love they lack truth and are no better than what he is opposing.

To 'turn over to Satan' (see also 1 Corinthians 5:5) seems to mean to declare solemnly that the men concerned have, by their behaviour, placed themselves outside the church. Note that such a declaration is made in the hope that 'they may learn not to blaspheme'. They have been taking the Lord's name in vain by teaching in his name what is not true – something of which Paul has already accused himself (see 1:13).

¹⁸I am giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you,

so that by following them you may fight the good fight,

¹⁹having faith and a good conscience.

By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith;

²⁰among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme.

**¹First of all, then,
I urge that supplications,
prayers, intercessions, and
thanksgivings be made for everyone,
²for kings and all
who are in high positions,
so that we may lead a quiet and
peaceable life in all godliness
and reverence [NRSV 'dignity'].**

Paul is writing that Timothy 'may know how one ought to behave in the household of God'(3:15). He begins with prayer, for our relationship with God shapes all other relationships. Only a community which is in touch with the religious experience of its members and gives expression to this experience can discern and respond to God's will. Paul will go on to speak about the mediatory role of Christ, a role which includes intercessory prayer, for it is Christ 'who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us'(Romans 8:34) before his Father. Since the church is his body, living by his Spirit, the prayer of the church is the prayer of Christ in which each Christian is caught up into Christ's own prayer. Christ living in us is most intimately experienced when the Christian community assembles in prayer.

Always the missionary, Paul's concern is for the proclamation of the gospel which has been entrusted to him (see 1:11). An essential dimension of the gospel is its 'catholicity': it is for *all* people. It is likely that the Jewish Christians who were causing trouble in the community were not in favour of the Gentile mission. Furthermore, their speculation about genealogies (see 1:4) points to a narrow perception as to who is and who is not to be saved.

Paul is concerned that the Christian community is being drawn into the growing tension between the Jews and Rome. The Christian communities are not aligned with Jewish nationalism, and this must be clear for all to see. Paul recognises the important role played by civil government and urges prayer especially for those in influential positions in society: prayer that they will govern according to God's will, and prayer that they will come to the knowledge of the truth (compare Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1).

God does not need our prayer to be induced to pour out all the grace that people need for salvation. It is we who need prayer to open our hearts to welcome the grace that is being offered. Prayer is an expression of our communion with God, which Paul calls 'godliness' (*eusebeia*). For an understanding of the significance of this term and the reasons for Paul's use of it, we refer the reader to the commentary on Titus 1:1. 'Reverence' (*semnotēs*) is closely related to *eusebeia*. It says more than 'dignity', as it speaks of a life that avoids dissipation and distraction because of an awareness of the sacred (see Titus 2:2,7). The influence exercised by those in positions of authority in the state makes prayer for them especially important. Here, however, the emphasis is on prayer being offered 'for everyone'—prayer of all kinds, including prayer for mercy, prayer for needs, and prayer of thanksgiving.

If we pray for everyone, our heart will be open to demonstrate to everyone the love that God gives us for them in prayer. True love must be universal because ‘God our Saviour desires everyone to be saved’. Paul’s logic could not be simpler. This was one of his major themes in his Letter to the Romans (see the reflection at the end of the commentary on that letter). It has been Paul’s conviction from the start that his apostolic commission is to proclaim God’s offer of salvation to all the nations. In his First Letter to the Thessalonians he declares that those who are hindering his ministry ‘displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved’ (1Thessalonians 2:15-16). Everyone who responds in faith to God’s offer of grace in Christ, everyone who lives by the Spirit of Christ, shares in some way in this same ministry. This is why, in this same letter to the Thessalonians, Paul is concerned that Christians behave in such a way as to attract outsiders (1Thessalonians 4:12). It is why he exhorts them that their love increase, not only for each other, but for *all* (1Thessalonians 3:12), and that they do good to *all* (1Thessalonians 5:15).

In his correspondence with the Corinthian church, Paul focuses attention on the cross of Christ as the revelation of God’s love. He presents Christ ‘in whom God was reconciling *the world* to himself’ (2Corinthians 5:19). He wants them to learn to love as Christ loved (see 1Corinthians 13:4-7). He wants them to ‘behold the glory of the Lord’ and be transformed into his likeness ‘from one degree of glory to another’ (2Corinthians 3:18). God has enlightened them, and so their mission to the world is to ‘give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2Corinthians 4:6). The life in the Spirit that they now experience is itself a guarantee that what is mortal will be ‘swallowed up in life’ (2Corinthians 5:4). It is God’s will, through the spread of the gospel, to draw *all* to this experience, and so Paul admonishes them:

Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

– 1Corinthians 10:32 - 11:1

³This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

God wills all to be saved

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul rejoices that ‘the gospel is bearing fruit and growing *in the whole world*’(1:6). The heart of the gospel is Christ: his revelation of God, and the life that he makes possible for all. ‘Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present *everyone* mature in Christ’(1:28). He reminds them of how God ‘rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son’(1:13). ‘And you, who were dead in trespasses ... God made alive with him’(2:13).

The letter to the Ephesians stresses the centrality of Christ in God’s eternal design for the salvation of the world. The nations are called to be ‘sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel’(Ephesians 3:6). God’s design is to draw everything into unity under Christ as head.

To the Philippians he writes: ‘I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord’(3:8). The mission of the Philippians was to ‘hold fast to the word of life’(2:16), to treasure the knowledge and intimate communion with Christ which they experienced, and to ‘shine like stars in the world’(2:15).

When, therefore, Paul speaks of ‘God our Saviour, who desires *everyone* to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth’(2:4), he is giving expression to his fundamental insight into the universality of God’s love. He is continuing to carry out his apostolic commission given him by ‘Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour’(1:1) to preach the gospel of that love.

It is typical of the Pastoral Letters that Paul would connect salvation so closely with coming to ‘the knowledge of the truth’. We recall the way in which he introduced himself and the main theme of his letter in writing to Titus:

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness.

– Titus 1:1

As explained in commenting on that text, the ‘truth’, for Paul, is the truth of who God really is, and what God’s will for us is, as revealed in Jesus. Heterodox teaching, to the extent that it does not proclaim the truth, is not a medium of grace or of salvation. By planting bad seed it mixes weeds with the wheat (see Matthew 13:25). The weeds can strangle the young plants, so that the good seed comes to nothing. Heterodox teaching, if not checked, can ruin the harvest.

The fact that salvation is meant for all rests ultimately on monotheism: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone’ (Deuteronomy 6:4). The fact that salvation comes to all through Christ rests on the place of Christ in God’s providential plan (*oikonomia*, 1:4) for the saving of sinners (see 1:15):

There is *one* God, the Father, from whom are *all* things and for whom we exist, and *one* Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are *all* things and through whom we exist.

– 1 Corinthians 8:6

All things have been created through Christ; and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself *all* things.

– Colossians 1:16,20

In what may be Paul’s earliest extant letter, he states that Jesus ‘gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father’ (Galatians 1:4). Paul experienced this as being true for him personally: ‘the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). It is true for all the nations. As Paul urges: ‘live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Ephesians 5:2). In Christ ‘the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all’ (Titus 2:11). Paul writes to the Corinthians: ‘As all die in Adam, so *all* will be made alive in Christ’ (1 Corinthians 15:22). The salvation and the knowledge of the truth that God intends for the whole world is what God has revealed and offered to us through Jesus.

Through Christ’s life and especially through his life-giving, God has revealed his love in a way that can attract all to him. By raising Christ from the dead and exalting him in glory, he has made him the source of a new way of living for all: a way which is free from the dominion of sin, and is responsive to grace. Christ has attained the goal for which all humankind, indeed all creation, was intended. He is the new Adam, the beginning of a new creation. Through him, by sharing his life, all can now live as sons and daughters of God. Hence the importance of the gospel. Hence the central role of the church in God’s loving design. The church as the visible body of the exalted Christ, lives his life, and witnesses to his love. It is in the church that the gospel is preserved and proclaimed. It is in and through the Church that Christ carries on his mission of drawing all to his Father. Paul refers to Jesus as the ‘one mediator’. There follows a reflection on the significance of this mediation.

**⁵For there is one God;
there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human,
⁶who gave himself a ransom for all**

A reflection on mediation

Why does Paul call Jesus the ‘one mediator’(2:5)? In the period prior to Jesus, Moses was a mediator between God and the people. So were the prophets. God’s judgment was seen as being mediated through historical events, such as the destruction of Jerusalem and the edict releasing the exiles from captivity in Babylon. Indeed God was thought of as being present to people through the mediation of creation, for ‘his glory fills the whole earth’ (Isaiah 6:3). In the text under consideration Paul is speaking of his preaching and teaching as mediating God’s word. Christians have understood the writings of the New Testament in the same way.

If people interpose themselves between us and God then we are dealing with interference, not with mediation. But Christ can choose to come to one person through another. When someone gives a cup of water in his name, is not Christ loving that person through the kindness of the other? Does not a husband mediate the love of Christ to his wife?: ‘Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’(Ephesians 5:25). Does not a wife mediate this same love to her husband? Are not parents mediating God’s love to their children? Surely, prophecy still exists in the Church and in the world? Is not this rightly spoken of as mediation?

Jesus said:

You are the light of the world ... Let your light so shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

– Matthew 5:14,16

He also said:

Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me.

– Luke 10:16

It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

– Matthew 10:20

John writes:

Whoever knows God listens to us.

– 1John 4:6

John and Paul and all the other apostles, ministers and members of the early Christian communities were not acting independently of Christ. They did not see themselves as alternatives to him. But they were commissioned by Christ to be mediators of his word, his forgiveness and his love. The reality of mediation is expressed each time Paul, or one of the other writers, carries out his mission or instructs others to carry out theirs.

At times an individual in the community, or even the community itself, can fail to do this. This happens when in God’s name we act in ways that are at variance with the commission we have been given. It happens when we preach ourselves and not Christ. It happens when we work to retain human traditions instead of the saving action of God who is calling us to transcend these limited vehicles and listen to his call. But this does not deny the sacred reality of divinely willed mediation.

An act of love performed by one person to another does mediate God's love and draw the receiver and the giver into prayer-communion with God. Teachers mediate knowledge, doctors and nurses mediate healing, public servants mediate service. Our world is full of the glory of God. Every moment can be a sacrament of God's presence and God's redeeming love. A most important place in all this mediation of grace is that intended by Christ for 'all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ' (1Corinthians 1:2); that is to say, for the church which 'is his body, the fullness of him who fills all things completely, everywhere' (Ephesians 1:23).

Authoritative teaching can mediate the truth. Sainly living can mediate life. Wise counsel can mediate the way along which grace is calling us. Organ music or a lighted candle can mediate grace and peace. So can running water. So can the words of a sermon. So can words of forgiveness spoken by a spouse, or in the formal celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation by the priest chosen to forgive in Christ's name. A mother and a father can mediate God's care. So can a friend, or a saintly neighbour. Such mediation is happening all the time: 'There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone' (1Corinthians 12:4-6).

Paul said: 'It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me' (Galatians 2:20). So when Paul acts as mediator, it is Christ who is mediating in and through him. It is not Christ *or* Paul. It is not Christ *and* Paul. It is Christ *in* Paul. The same is true of all who live Christ's life. The vine is bearing fruit through the branches (John 15:5).

When Paul writes: 'There is one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus', he is saying that all divine mediation is focused now on Christ 'in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (Colossians 2:9). This mediation of Christ can come to us through any instrument whom Christ may choose.

Jesus the one mediator, and God's universal call to salvation

Paul's teaching echoes the words of Jesus when he said: 'When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw *all* people to myself' (John 12:32). The essence of the Gospel is that God is indeed the Source of life (the Father-Mother) of every person conceived into this world, and that God's love for each is unconditional and complete. It is obvious from everything Jesus did and said that God intends to draw everyone into divine communion whatever their race, or wherever they may live on this earth.

The Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin gives expression to sentiments that would be shared by many holy women and men from any number of the religious traditions that enrich our human family by contributing to what Justin Martyr calls 'a symphony of salvation.'

Those with a passionate sense of the divine cannot bear to find things about them obscure, tepid and empty, when they should be full and vibrant with God. They are astonished by the number of people linked in the unity of the same world, who are not yet fully kindled by the flame of the divine presence.

Mediation

There was a time when they thought that they had only to stretch out their hands in order to touch God to the measure of their desires. Now they see that the only embrace capable of enfolding the divine is that of all humankind opening its arms to call down and welcome the fire. The only subject capable ultimately of mystical transformation is the whole family of humankind forming a single body and a single soul in love.

– *The Divine Milieu*, page 144

A genuine religious sentiment cannot be sectarian. There is only one God. Everything and everybody is interconnected. We all belong, for we are all expressions of the one Source of all. Every genuinely religious person recognises that love gives us our key insight into the sacred. While recognising God's self-communication throughout the whole of the created universe and the value of the response found in the various religions of the world, it is the conviction of Christianity that God's self-communication and the response to it reached its perfect human form in Jesus of Nazareth. Every created thing is an expression of God's Word, but Jesus is God's focal Word, revealing without distortion, in his person and in his teaching, who God really is: a God of love. He also shows us how to respond to God in love. In Paul's words: 'In Christ the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (Colossians 2:9).

Such a claim is in no way disrespectful to the many human responses to God that find expression in other religions. Those of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries who became his disciples saw Jesus, not as abolishing Judaism, but as bringing it to its perfection (see Matthew 5:17). People from other religious traditions who have become disciples of Jesus could say the same about their religious heritage.

God's self-communication is mediated, and so is subject to all kinds of distortions. Furthermore, we human beings do not always pick things up properly or respond appropriately. All this is, of course, true for those of us who wish to be disciples of Jesus. Heaven forbid that we should claim to be better than anyone else. The Christian claim is about Jesus, not about how we are responding. There is need, therefore, for constant correction and purification of our concept of God. Christian tradition does this by focusing on the person and the life of Jesus, drawing on the experience of those of his contemporaries who found in him a perfect human expression of God. Their experience has been re-affirmed by the countless millions since who have looked to him, and committed themselves to live as his disciples. While sharing in God's own respect for the genuine response to God of every person and of all cultures, Christians enjoy the immense privilege of knowing Jesus. Reflection on the life and significance of Jesus has been for Christians the richest source for their reflections on the meaning of God, and so for their reflections on the meaning of human experience.

The goal of our lives is communion in love with God. Christians have discovered that the way to the communion of love for which we are created is through Jesus. They have found in Jesus the way to connect with their deepest yearnings, and the way to connect with God. Jesus lives in this communion. He reveals the life-giving truth of God's love and, through the gift of his own life, he enables us to share this divine communion with him.

Addressing the Jewish Council, Peter speaks of Jesus and says:

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.

– Acts 4:12

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says to Thomas:

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

– John 14:6

One hears texts such as these being used in an attempt to prove that only those who are explicitly and consciously Christian can be saved. Such an interpretation is contrary to the teaching of the whole New Testament. God alone can save. The point of Peter's assertion is that we cannot be saved if we *reject* God's self-revelation and redeeming action in Jesus. Through the intimacy of his communion with Jesus John penetrated into the profound mystery of Jesus' divinity. Listening to Jesus in John's Gospel we often find ourselves listening to the Divine Word. John is stating that we cannot achieve communion with God in any other way than in response to God's self-giving, God's Word, of whom Jesus is the perfect human expression.

How, then, does God intend to draw everyone to him? It is the Spirit of God that fills all things. Now that Jesus has been raised to fullness of life by God, it is the Spirit of God in Jesus – the Spirit which binds him in love to the Father – that fills all things, giving life to all who open their hearts to this Spirit. It is the belief of Christians that when we respond to God's invitation to live in divine communion, we are drawn to share the life, the prayer-communion of Jesus himself. It is God who transforms us by drawing us into ever more intimate communion. Transforming union happens as we allow ourselves to be drawn into divine communion by Jesus' own Spirit of Love. Paul writes:

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

– Romans 5:5

To the Samaritan woman Jesus promises:

The water that I will give will become in you a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

– John 4:14

On a later occasion Jesus promised that rivers of life-giving water would flow from the hearts of those who believed in him. John adds the following comment: 'Jesus was speaking of the Spirit which those who believe in him were to receive' (John 7:38-39). At the last supper we hear Jesus say:

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

– John 14:23

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us ... so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them.

– John 17:21,26

Mediation

The sacrament of the Spirit of Jesus' love, the place where Jesus' Spirit is powerfully effective, is the community of the Christian church, an extension in the world of Jesus' body. It is in a special way in and through the church that God speaks his Word and communicates himself to the world. Paul writes:

God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of God's will, according to God's good pleasure which God set forth in Christ as God's providential design for the fullness of time, to put *all* things under Christ as head ... God has made him head over *all* things for the Church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills *all* things completely, everywhere.

– Ephesians 1:9-10, 22-23

Those who share Jesus' Spirit share his commitment to all people. From the beginning, the church has been called 'catholic' for the very reason that it was committed to universality. The church's mission is to carry on the mission of Jesus from whose love no one is excluded. As Ignatius of Antioch wrote in the first years of the second century:

Where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.

– Epistle to Smyrna 8.2

Living by Jesus' Spirit is not simply a matter of words, or externals. It is a matter of faith, hope and love. As Jesus said:

It is not anyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', who will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but the person who does the will of my Father.

– Matthew 7:21

The only kind of faith which Paul sought to inspire in people was 'faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6). We are to 'do the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15). We can conclude that if we wish to be saved, each of us, from where we now stand, must draw closer to full communion with the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic church' (Creed of Nicene-Constantinople, 381AD), and be committed to a life of deeper faith, more trusting hope, and more perfect love. It follows that to reject, positively and explicitly, belief in Jesus as the revelation of God is to reject God's Word, and to refuse to welcome God's offer of life:

Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved; whoever rejects belief will be condemned.

– Mark 16:16

This is not because the exalted Jesus is not drawing everyone to himself and so to the Father (John 12:32), but because such a person refuses to receive the offer so lovingly made. What, then, of those who have never heard of Jesus? What of people who think they are rejecting Jesus, but are rejecting only the false Jesus that has been presented to them? If God really intends everyone to be saved, is God limited by geography or by our sinful failure to preach the Gospel in an authentic way? Must those who through no fault of their own have never had an opportunity explicitly to come to know and love Jesus miss out on the opportunity to respond to the Spirit of the risen Jesus and be drawn to the Father?

Does not Paul say that Jesus ‘fills *all* things, completely, everywhere’ (Ephesians 1:23). Jesus is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:13). This Word spoke in the prophets for centuries before the Incarnation (Hebrews 1:1). This same self-communication of God has been operative ‘since the beginning’ (1 John 1:1), ‘enlightening *everyone*’ (John 1:9). The risen Jesus is now drawing everyone to himself, drawing them in mysterious ways to ‘whatever is true, whatever is inspiring of reverence, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is attracting of love, whatever is commendable’ (Philippians 4:8).

For those who aimed for glory and honour and immortality by persevering in doing good, there will be eternal life ... glory and honour and peace will come to everyone who does good.

– Romans 2:7,10

The Second Vatican Council has this to say:

It is only in the mystery of the Word-made-flesh that the reality of the human person truly becomes clear ... In revealing the mystery of the Father and his love, Christ reveals to us who we really are ... By the Incarnation, Jesus, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each human being ... If we follow him, life and death are made holy and acquire a new meaning ... Sharing in the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection, the Christian, strengthened by hope, is moving forward to the risen life. All this holds true not only for Christians but for everyone of good will in whose heart grace is invisibly active. Christ died for all, and all people are called to one and the same divine destiny. We must hold, therefore, that the Spirit of God offers to everyone the possibility of sharing, in a way known to God, in the mystery of Christ’s dying and rising. Such is the nature and the greatness of the mystery of human beings as seen in the light of Christian revelation. It is through Christ, and in Christ that light is cast on the riddle of suffering and death which, apart from his Gospel, overwhelms us. Christ has risen again, destroying death by his death, and has given life abundantly to us so that, living the life of God’s Son, we may cry out, in the Spirit: Abba! Father!

– Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n.22

This does not lessen the importance of preaching the Gospel to everyone by word and example, and of welcoming everyone into the church which is the ‘fullness of Christ’. God willed to reveal God’s heart in the heart of Jesus. God willed to reveal God’s face in the face of Jesus. God willed to reveal God’s word in the words of Jesus. We who have had the privilege of seeing ‘the glory of God on the face of Jesus’ (2 Corinthians 4:6), of hearing his words and experiencing the intimacy of his heart will surely want to respond to his mission to draw all to Jesus so that they will know who it is who is drawing them to the Father. Let us listen also to the following exhortation from Pope Paul VI:

It would be useful if every Christian and every evangeliser were to pray about the following thought: people can gain salvation also in other ways, by God’s mercy, even though we do not preach the Gospel to them; but as for us, can we gain salvation if through negligence or fear or shame – what Saint Paul called ‘blushing for the Gospel’ (Romans 1:16) – or as a result of false ideas, we fail to preach it? For that would be to betray the call of God, who wishes the seed to bear fruit through the voice of the ministers of the Gospel; and it will depend on us whether this grows into trees and produces its full fruit.

Mediation

Let us therefore preserve our fervour of spirit. Let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelising, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us – as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other Apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelisers all through the Church's history – an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench.

May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelisers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world.

– Evangelisation in the Modern World, 1975, n. 80

The risen Jesus is already drawing every person to himself and so to his Father. We will be saved if we respond to his Spirit, even if we do not come to an explicit awareness of the One who is drawing us. The task of the Christian church is to be the instrument of Jesus for drawing everyone to the fullness of his life. We are to be the face and the heart of Jesus in the world. We are to mediate his grace and draw everyone to the fullness of life in him and the assurance of salvation that comes with living his life. The church is to be a 'seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race' (Vatican II, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n.3).

Let us then in our dealings with each other generously share what we have experienced of God's Word and Spirit through our communion with Jesus, knowing that God is already speaking his Word to everyone and pouring over them the Spirit of love that he shares with the Father. As we speak to others, whatever religious culture they identify with, let us listen to what God's Word has been saying to them, trusting that in this dialogue we will all come to know and love God better and so enjoy an ever more profound communion in the divine life of love. Let us do so in the profound hope that where Jesus is presented in an authentic way, those whose hearts are open will come to recognise in him the fulfilment of all the genuine religious experiences with which they have been graced.

Paul has just instructed Timothy to see that the churches under his care come together and pray to God for everyone, because ‘God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (2:4). God attested this through the revelation made through Christ Jesus ‘who gave himself a ransom for all’. God did so ‘in his own time’ (Greek: *kairos*), an expression which Paul uses also in his Letter to Titus when he writes of how God ‘in his own time, revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour’ (Titus 1:3). Paul is looking beyond time as a measure of change in our world. He is looking to the surprise of God’s presence and action which remain mysterious and over which we have no control.

In verse seven it is again obvious that, though the letter is addressed to Timothy, it is meant for the community, and especially for those in the community who are challenging the authenticity of Paul’s apostolic commission. Paul has had to deal with this challenge from the beginning of his ministry. His assertion here, as always, is in view of asserting the authenticity of the gospel which he preaches – the gospel which he has just stated concerns the universal scope of God’s will to save. He was appointed a herald, to proclaim the good news of the salvation which God wills for all. He was appointed an apostle, sent by the risen Christ to tell everyone what he has seen and heard. He was appointed a teacher of the Gentiles, to reveal the implications of the good news for them. Paul is using his claim to be an apostle to support the truth of what he has just said. He really has ‘seen Jesus our Lord’ (1 Corinthians 9:1), and he has been commissioned to tell the whole world that salvation is offered to *everyone*.

People are to welcome the good news of salvation ‘in faith’. To do so, they will need to know the ‘truth’ (compare Titus 1:1).

[verses 5 and 6a are repeated from page 685

⁵For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, ⁶who gave himself a ransom for all]

— this was attested in his own time [NRSV ‘at the right time’].

⁷For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

**⁸I desire, then,
that in every place
the men should
pray, lifting up
holy hands without
anger or argument;
⁹also that the wom-
en should dress
themselves modest-
ly and decently in
suitable clothing,
not with their hair
braided, or with
gold, pearls, or ex-
pensive clothes,
¹⁰but with good
works, as is proper
for women who
profess reverence
for God.**

Paul continues his instructions concerning prayer in the Christian assembly. Some see in the phrase ‘in every place’ an echo of the prophecy of Malachi which found fulfilment in the Christian assembly:

From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering.

– Malachi 1:11

Paul’s instructions to both men and women are quite specific. We can only assume that the problems he was addressing were also quite specific and that he is laying down principles of behaviour *for them* (he is not writing for every congregation for the rest of time!) and as a support to Timothy, who is to assert his authority to bring better order into the public assemblies.

Paul speaks first of all about the men. The hands which they raise in prayer are to be ‘holy’ (Greek: *hosios*). In other words, their prayer must be an expression of their life in which their actions (their ‘hands’) demonstrate the respect for the sacred which their lips proclaim when they pray. In view of Paul’s concern about the divisions in the community that are being caused by teachers who ‘promote speculations’ (1:4) and indulge in ‘meaningless talk’ (1:6), we are not surprised that Paul highlights the problem of anger and argument. He is calling for an end to empty disputes and for reconciliation of differences by a focus on ‘love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith’ (1:5). Did not Jesus say: ‘Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one’ (Mark 11:25)? And again:

If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

– Matthew 5:23-24

We would understand Paul’s words to the women better if we knew how the erroneous teaching was affecting them. It seems as though the more well-off were flaunting their position and missing the point of the freedom which membership of the Christian community gave them. Paul’s point is that if they are looking for adornments, they should find them in good works. As he says in his letter to the Ephesians; ‘We are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life’ (Ephesians 2:20).

Our lack of information concerning the situation which Paul is addressing makes it difficult to give a confident interpretation of Paul's words here. There may be some parallels in 1Corinthians 14:33-35, but that text is itself quite problematic, in that it is not clear whether it represents Paul's thought or the thought of others with which he disagrees. We examined Paul's understanding of the relative roles of men and women in the order of creation, as well as the assumptions that lay behind his position, when commenting on 1Corinthians 11:2-16. It is against this background that we should read his words here.

In itself, verse eleven is simply instructing the women to listen quietly and attentively to the person who is doing the teaching in the assembly. The 'submission' (*hupotagē*) which Paul is requiring is submission to the teacher. He has already insisted that the men avoid 'argument' (2:8). We can assume that he addresses this particular injunction to the women because of the disruption being caused by some women in the Ephesian churches. He has found it necessary to insist on the excommunication of two of the male leaders of the heterodox camp (1:20). If the women who are pushing themselves forward as teachers are those who have been swayed by heterodox teaching (and there are indications in the text that this is the case, as we shall note shortly), he hopes that the practical measure of instructing the women not to teach will settle things down, and that order in the assembly will be restored.

Verse twelve, however, seems to be saying more than this. What does Paul mean by saying: 'I permit no woman to have authority over (*authentēō*) a man'? The nuance conveyed by *authentēō* is much disputed. In the context, Paul could well be focusing precisely on the assembly and on the role of authoritative teaching. It may be that those women who are teaching are flaunting their new found freedom, are pushing themselves forward, and, furthermore, are teaching error. They may be laying down the law and refusing to learn. Our ignorance of the situation which Paul is addressing should at least warn us not to generalise from what he is saying here. If the women were competent and giving 'sound teaching that conforms to the gospel which God entrusted to me' (1:11), Paul may well have written quite differently.

¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with full submission.

¹²I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man;

she is to keep silent.

¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve;

¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

¹⁵Yet she will be saved through child-bearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with sound thinking [NRSV 'modesty'].

Paul supports his instruction by referring to the relationship between Adam and Eve as found in the book of Genesis. Since they are the first man and woman, he sees them as archetypes of an unchanging divine design. His first argument is that 'Adam was formed first, then Eve' (see Genesis 2:22-23). He used this same point in his First Letter to the Corinthians 11:8 (see the commentary), with the same purpose of illustrating what he understands as the divinely-willed subordination of woman to man. His second argument is based on the story of the first sin as narrated also in the book of Genesis. Paul notes that the serpent deceived Eve, not Adam (see Genesis 3:1-6,13). He referred to this deceiving of Eve by the serpent also in 2Corinthians 11:3. Paul is not claiming to give the meaning of the Genesis account. Following the practice of his day, he takes one aspect of the text, and uses it to illustrate his argument. We reflected on Paul's use of Scripture in the commentary on Galatians 3:6. That Paul makes a point of stressing the fact that Eve was deceived is an indication that he is addressing women teachers who have themselves been deceived into teaching 'different doctrine' (1:3). Since Eve was deceived and transgressed the commandment of God, she had to live with the consequences:

I will greatly increase your pangs in child-bearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

– Genesis 3:16

This state of things, according to Genesis, is the result of sin. It is also a constant reminder of sin. Later in the letter, Paul mentions that one of the errors of the false teachers is that they 'forbid marriage' (4:3). It is likely that the women teachers were using this text to instruct other women that in the new creation which they have entered as Christians they should avoid child-bearing. This would explain Paul's insistence here on the value for a Christian woman of motherhood and the rearing of children.

He concludes his remarks by focusing, once again, on the central importance of 'faith and love' (see 1:5,14), to which he adds 'holiness' (*hagiasmos*, 'sanctification'). As he wrote to the Thesalonians: 'God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through *sanctification* by the Spirit and through belief in the truth' (2Thesalonians 2:13); and to the Romans: 'now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is *sanctification*. The end is eternal life' (Romans 6:22). Finally, he stresses the importance of thinking in a way that is based on sound teaching (*sōphrosunē*). They are to have 'the mind of Christ' (Philippians 2:5; see the commentary on Titus 1:8).

Paul refers to Eve's being deceived and sinning in a precise context of false teaching that is being promoted by certain women and is disrupting the assemblies. He cannot be blamed for those who, with little of Paul's intelligence or love and little understanding of his way of using scripture, have taken his words out of context and used his authority to present woman as the weaker partner, more easily seduced by Satan. Paul's words have been used as an instrument for the denigration and subjugation of woman in a way that would have horrified Paul.

He was concerned to respect divine order as he saw it, and to see that measures were taken in a particular context to re-establish order in the Christian assembly. His writings, and his practice as far as we know it, indicate that he himself had nothing but the most profound respect for women in ministry. He was concerned that both woman and man share in the fullness of Christ's life and express their Spirit-given gifts in a way that build up the community and serve the gospel to the praise and glory of God.

In our day, in the light of the gospel, we see the authority relationship between man and woman in a different way. Fidelity to the gospel as Paul preached and lived it requires that we follow his key insights: that we are all one in Christ, and that what matters is faith that finds expression in love; and that we work for liberation of man and woman together in love. To refuse to do so, and worse still to quote Paul outside the context of his own thinking to support our refusal, is to demonstrate our unwillingness to listen to the gospel which was entrusted to him (1:11) and of which he was 'a herald and apostle in faith and truth'(2:7).

¹The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.

²Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher,

³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.

It is not clear why Paul feels the need to stress in such a solemn way (compare 1:15) the excellence of the ministry exercised by those who are responsible for supervising the life of the local church. Since one of their central roles is teaching, and since there are obvious problems in Ephesus due to erroneous teaching, it may be that some have abused or misused their position as bishops and given the occupation a bad name. In any case, Paul takes the occasion to highlight the kinds of qualities that are needed in those called to this ministry.

The office of overseeing is a public position. It is especially important that the bishop's behaviour be such that people cannot establish a case of wrongdoing against him and thus bring the community into disrepute. Being 'above reproach' (*anepilēptos*) is the equivalent of the first quality which Paul required of a bishop in his letter to Titus, when he stated that the bishop must be 'blameless' (*anegklētos*, Titus 1:6,7). There, too, he required that he be 'married only once' (Titus 1:6). In the commentary on Titus we suggested that this may have been required of him as a witness to the mutual fidelity between Christ and the community.

Being 'temperate' (*nēphalios*) was something which Paul in his letter to Titus expected of older men in the community (see Titus 2:2). There the focus seems to have been on the problem of excessive drinking. It may be the same here, though the repetition of this idea in verse three suggests that Paul has a more general moderation in mind. 'Sensible' translates *sōphrōn*, a word that continues to recur in the Pastoral Epistles. As we saw when commenting on Titus 1:8, it refers to a person's thinking and requires that it be 'sane', in the sense of 'healed'. For a Christian, it is to have 'the mind of Christ' (Philippians 2:4). The bishop is to be 'respectable' (*kosmios*), a word Paul has already used in relation to the way women dress in the assembly (see 2:9). The bishop is to behave in a way that is appropriate to his position and that will evoke admiration in others, rather than disapproval. In his letter to Titus, Paul also stressed the importance of hospitality (Titus 1:8) and of his being competent as a teacher (Titus 1:9). He has a special responsibility to see that guests, including travelling missionaries, are received well, and, as this letter continues to insist, teaching sound doctrine is essential for a healthy Christian community.

Drunkenness and violence (also Titus 1:7) are particularly inappropriate in one who is responsible for hospitality and teaching, as are being 'quarrelsome' (see Titus 3:2) and being 'a lover of money' (the equivalent of 'greedy for gain' in Titus 1:7). On the contrary, he is to be 'gentle' (see Titus 3:2), with the 'gentleness of Christ' (2Corinthians 10:1).

In his letter to Titus also, Paul stressed the importance of his being able to manage (Greek: *proistēmi*) his own household well (see Titus 1:6), in the sense of being outstanding in his care for the family, in such a way that his family follows his lead. The bishop is to be ‘respectful’ (*semniotēs*, ‘aware of the sacred’, see Titus 2:2). As Paul explains, if he cannot do this for his own household, how can he do it for ‘the household of God’ (Ephesians 2:19) which is God’s church? The requirement that a bishop not be a recent convert (*neophutos*, ‘neophyte’) cannot function as a general rule, for it presumes a church that, like Ephesus, has been established for some time. We do not find it listed in Paul’s instructions to the less established church in Crete. However, Paul is concerned that a person in whom the faith has only just been planted (see the image in 1Corinthians 3:6-9) may be carried away by the power of his position, fall into the same trap as the devil (pride) and suffer the same condemnation.

The mission of the church, which is always foremost in Paul’s consciousness, requires that outsiders are attracted by the members of the Christian community, and in a special way by the one responsible for overall supervision. Paul could have added, as he did in writing to the Corinthians: ‘just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved’ (1Corinthians 10:32).

While our word ‘bishop’ comes from the Greek *episkopos*, we should not imagine a bishop then as exercising his ministry in the manner typical of a bishop today. The essence of the ministry is the same. It is a coordinating, managerial role which is of central importance in fostering the unity of the community. However, many historical factors have influenced the development of the ministry over the centuries. Paul is writing about a married man whose function was to supervise the organisational running of a small local Christian community. The authority exercised by Paul himself, or by his delegate – in this case Timothy – would have set limits on the authority exercised by the bishop. Also, his leadership, being a gift of the Spirit, was to be exercised with respect to the direction given the community by the apostles, prophets, and evangelists (see Ephesians 4:11). It is after Paul’s death and the combining of the role of Timothy with that of the overseer that we see developing the ministry of the bishop as we find it at the beginning of the second century in, for example, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. Many other historical influences account for the way in which the ministry has been exercised over the centuries.

⁴He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and [‘he must be’] respectful in every way — ⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church?

⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

⁷Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

⁸Deacons likewise must be sensitive to the sacred [NRSV 'serious'] not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money;

⁹they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a pure [NRSV 'clear'] conscience.

¹⁰And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.

¹¹Women likewise must be sensitive to the sacred [NRSV 'serious'], not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.

¹²Let deacons be men of one wife [NRSV 'married only once'], and let them manage their children and their households well;

¹³for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

This section is also directed to those who are responsible for carrying out certain public ministries in the church. Deacons were mentioned alongside bishops in the address of Paul's Letter to the Philippians (Philippians 1:1). Interestingly, they are not mentioned in the Letter to Titus. Is this because their role emerged only in the more established churches in which the bishop required assistants whom he could delegate to carry out certain of his organisational responsibilities? In examining the idea of *diakonia* in commenting on 1 Corinthians 3:5, we saw that it referred to ministry as a delegate in a religious setting. Paul is a delegate from Christ. Are these ministers called 'deacons' because they are delegates of the bishop in the church of God? The description of the qualities required by deacons makes this likely.

Like the bishops (see 3:4), the deacons must be sensitive to the sacred (*semnos*, see the commentary on Titus 2:2). In conveying the instructions of the bishop or in teaching as his delegate, he must be direct and sincere, not saying one thing and meaning another. Again matters of excessive drinking and handling of money are mentioned (see 3:3).

In a church troubled by erroneous teaching, Paul underlines the central importance of 'the mystery of the faith'. As we saw in commenting upon Colossians 1:27, the word 'mystery' takes us to the heart of the gospel as Paul sees it, for it speaks of the revelation of God's love and God's plan of salvation as seen in the self-giving of Jesus on the cross. This is the third time Paul has linked 'faith' with 'conscience' (see 1:5,19). He is concerned that their faith be expressed in their conduct which is to be 'pure', and so characterised by love. They are to be tested and prove 'blameless' before being allowed to 'serve as deacons'.

It is difficult to know to whom Paul is referring in verse eleven. If it is to the wives of deacons, one is left wondering why he should select them out, having said nothing about the wives of bishops. If it is to female deacons, one wonders why he goes straight back to speak of the men in verse twelve.

Like bishops, deacons are to be 'men of one wife'. They are to have a profound respect for the sacred. They have to watch their tongue and their drinking habits, and be 'faithful', or perhaps better, 'trustworthy', in all matters. The deacons, again like bishops, are to be able to manage their own households well (see 3:4-5). Their ministry, too, is an eminently worthy one (compare 3:1).

Paul hopes to visit Timothy soon. He is writing in case something should happen to delay his coming. He summarises the central thrust of the letter which concerns ‘how one ought to behave in the household of God’. It is the disruption caused by erroneous teaching that accounts for Paul’s accent on good teaching and so on good teachers, who must concentrate on God’s plan (*oikonomia* ‘house-law’, see 1:4) for ‘the household (*oikos*) of God’. This description of the church is especially fitting when we recall that the community assembled in a home (see 3:4-5). In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul referred to Christians as the ‘family (*oikeios*, ‘members of the household’) of faith’ (Galatians 6:10). In his general letter to the Gentile churches he speaks of Christians as ‘members of the household of God’ (Ephesians 2:19). The church is ‘a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’ (Ephesians 2:22). As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: ‘we are the temple of the living God; as God said: I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (2 Corinthians 6:16). The presence of God in the midst of his people places special demands on our behaviour.

What sets the church apart from pagan religious assemblies is that it is ‘the church of the *living* God’. ‘The truth’ is the truth about who God really is and how God and God’s plan of salvation has been revealed. It is the ‘gospel of salvation’ (Ephesians 1:13), ‘the truth that is in Jesus’ (Ephesians 4:31). This is the truth, the gospel, that the church is to proclaim.

The Christian community is to be ‘the column and pedestal’ that celebrates the truth. Timothy is to model this. Paul may be alluding to the honorary columns that were erected to celebrate a victory. In which case he is saying that the lives of Christians must demonstrate the victory of God’s love, which is to be carved into their lives the way the victories of the emperors were carved into the columns (see Trajan’s column in the forum named after him). He may have in mind the pillar of cloud and of fire that led the people through the desert to the Promised Land (see Exodus 13:21). If so, then the point he is making is that the life of the church, including the behaviour of its members, is to be such as to guide the world on the way of salvation.

The life of the Christian community is the necessary pedestal on which the column is to rest. If the world is to hear the gospel it must come from a community whose life witnesses to the word which it proclaims.

¹⁴I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, ¹⁵if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the column and pedestal [NRSV ‘pillar and bulwark’] of the truth.

¹⁶Without any doubt, the mystery of religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.

Speaking of the church's mission to proclaim the gospel by the quality of its life, Paul presents a tightly structured creedal formula of what he calls 'the mystery of religion'. We examined his use of 'religion' (Greek: *eusebeia*) in the commentary on Titus 1:1. It is especially in his Letter to the Colossians that he develops the idea of 'mystery' (see the commentary on Colossians 1:27). At the heart of the Christian gospel, and so at the heart of Christian living, is the revelation of something that is unexpected and always surprising. 'The mystery of faith' (3:9) is that the saving power and love of God is revealed in the outpouring of love from the heart of the crucified Jesus.

It is with this truth that Paul begins: 'he was revealed in flesh'. To know God we must look upon the 'one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all' (2:5-6). It is in him that 'the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily' (Colossians 2:9). It is in the life, and especially in the life-giving, of Jesus that 'the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all' (Titus 2:11). It is in Jesus, sharing the brokenness and vulnerability of our human condition, that 'the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared' (Titus 3:4). What Jesus did 'in his fleshly body through death' (Colossians 1:22) was 'vindicated in spirit' by God who raised Jesus from death to life. These two opening formulas echo Paul's address to the Romans in which he speaks of 'the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 1:3-4).

The revelation of the mystery of God in the crucified and raised Christ is something that is 'seen by angels', and it is this mystery that is 'proclaimed (*kērussō*) among Gentiles'. This echoes Paul's earlier statement: 'For this I was appointed a herald (*kērux*) and an apostle, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth' (2:7). The following formula, 'believed in by the world' reinforces the accent Paul is placing here on the universal dimension of God's saving plan (see 2:4) and so of the church's mission.

Paul concludes his creed with a contemplation of Christ in glory. His insistence on sound doctrine throughout this letter is only so that the true gospel will be proclaimed, by word and deed, so that the world will come to know Christ and to experience God's saving love in him and in the church. The church is to proclaim the mystery so that all 'would come to believe in Christ for eternal life' (1:16), and be 'taken up into glory' with him.

Some have renounced the faith (see 1:19-20), and the church is being troubled by erroneous teaching (1:3-7). Paul reminds Timothy and those who will read this letter that this is something that they have been told to expect by the Spirit. It comes, therefore, within the providence of God. He could be referring to statements of Jesus himself, as when he warned his disciples: ‘Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray’ (Matthew 24:11). He could be referring to insights that he himself has received in prayer (see the warning he gave years earlier to the elders at Miletus, Acts 20:29-30). This is something he noted in his correspondence with the Thessalonians: ‘The mystery of lawlessness is already at work’ (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

It would appear that the purveyors of error are claiming the authority of the Spirit for their teaching. Paul assures Timothy that they are being deceived by evil spirits. This is not always easy to discern, since they practise ‘hypocrisy’ (*hupokrisis*). What they teach has the appearance of truth, but it is only a mask, hiding what is, in fact, false. They have ‘lost all sensitivity’ (Ephesians 4:19) to the truth, because their consciences are ineffective in condemning their immoral behaviour. They are callous, rendered insensitive as though by a hot iron.

Paul names two of their errors. The first is that ‘they forbid marriage’. It may be that behind their teaching lay the idea that with baptism they entered into the risen life in which, as Jesus said, ‘they neither marry or are given in marriage’ (Matthew 22:30). It is likely, as we noted earlier, that this was one of the matters being taught by the women teachers whom Paul said could not teach in the public assembly (see 2:11-15).

They also ‘demand abstinence from foods’. Paul’s allusion to the words of Genesis: ‘God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good’ (Genesis 1:31), counters any notion that living in the real world somehow inhibits the spiritual life, or that somehow, having risen with Christ, we are beyond matter: ‘the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s’ (1 Corinthians 10:26). There may also be Jewish influence here (see Titus 1:14-15). Paul has had to face this issue many times before, and his response is similar to the one which he gave the Corinthians:

If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.

– 1 Corinthians 10:30-31

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

²through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron.

³They forbid marriage

and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving;

⁵for it is sanctified by God’s word and by prayer.

⁶If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a fine servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the fine [NRSV 'sound'] teaching that you have followed.

⁷Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales.

Train yourself in godliness,

⁸for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

⁹The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance.

¹⁰For to this end we toil and struggle,

because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people – I mean [NRSV 'especially'] those who believe.

Paul is, in effect, telling the readers of the letter to expect this kind of instruction from Timothy, for it is what is required of him as a 'servant' (*diakonos*) of Christ Jesus. We reflected on the significance of *diakonos* in commenting on 1 Corinthians 3:5. Like Paul himself, Timothy is on a sacred mission from Christ whose will he is to carry out. Timothy himself has been richly nourished. The words that have nourished him are those 'of the faith': they have come from those who believe, like Paul himself; and they concern the object of faith, namely, God as revealed in Christ. The teaching that has nourished him has been 'fine' (*kalos*), in that it has expressed the beauty of reality and has issued in virtue. Furthermore, the words and teaching have not only been heard, but Timothy has 'followed' them (*parakolouthēō*). *akolouthēō* is used regularly in the gospels for those who 'follow' Jesus.

Timothy is to avoid getting caught up in what Paul referred to earlier as 'myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine plan that is known by faith' (1:4). Having used the metaphor of good nourishment, Paul now uses the metaphor of good physical exercise. Timothy is to 'train himself' (*gumnazō*, whence 'gymnastics') in 'godliness' (*eusebeia*). Physical training (*gymnasia*) is important if we wish to keep a healthy body. Likewise, to live in a way that is constantly sensitive to God's presence and obedient to God's will requires discipline. We examined *eusebeia* and Paul's use of it in commenting on Titus 1:1. 'Godliness' is concerned with the only life that ultimately matters: a sharing in the life of communion with God enjoyed by the risen Christ. This is something for now. It is also something that transcends physical death: something we can enjoy in 'the life to come'. We recall Paul's words to the Corinthians: 'Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one' (1 Corinthians 9:25).

As he said to the Colossians: 'to present everyone mature in Christ I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me' (Colossians 1:29). Throughout the constant striving and fatigue of the 'race', he keeps his eye on the goal which he has just mentioned: fullness of life with 'the living God' in whom he has placed his hope. The race continues for 'God our Saviour desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (2:4). Paul strives to bring everyone to the faith which welcomes the salvation that God is offering.

The preaching of the gospel in Ephesus began in the synagogue (see Acts 18:19). The first converts came from among the Jewish community and from the Gentiles who were associated with the synagogue. It is to be expected that, as the numbers of Gentiles in the Christian community increased, and because the community assembled in homes for the eucharist, it experienced the need to develop its own form of organisational leadership. The most natural thing was to follow the pattern that the early converts were accustomed to from the synagogue: leadership by a group of the older men ('elders', presbyters', see Acts 20:17). Timothy is not old enough to be an elder. His authority is as Paul's delegate and Paul is encouraging him not to hold back because of his age. As he wrote to the Corinthians: 'Timothy is doing the work of the Lord, just as I am; therefore let no one despise him' (1 Corinthians 16:10-11).

Timothy's position of authority puts a special obligation on him to be an example in his speech and in his conduct. Not surprisingly, Paul singles out love and faith, mentioned together also in 1:5, 1:14 and 2:15. He is, of course, speaking of 'the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus' (1:14). To these he adds 'purity' (*hagneia*), for Timothy is to live always in the presence of God, conscious of the sacred nature of his ministry (see also 2 Corinthians 6:6; Philippians 4:8).

By saying 'until I arrive', Paul is reminding the readers that Timothy is acting on his behalf and that they are to respect and obey him as they would Paul himself. Verse thirteen gives us an interesting glimpse into some aspects of what happened when the community assembled. In keeping with the key thrust of the letter, Paul focuses on matters of teaching. First there is the public reading of the sacred scriptures. This is followed by 'exhorting' (*paraklēsis*). As we noted in commenting on Paul's use of *parakaleō* (see 1 Thessalonians 2:12), the focus is on communicating the call of the risen Christ. In the present context he may well be referring to prophecy in which the congregation is open to the inspiration of Christ's Spirit. Having read the scriptures, and having listened for Christ's living word, those responsible for teaching are to base their teaching on God's word, as found in the Scriptures, and as interpreted in the Spirit.

¹¹These are the things you must insist on and teach.

¹²Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

¹³Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching.

¹⁴Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.

¹⁵Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.

¹⁶Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

The laying on of hands is a gesture used in many and varied situations in the New Testament, as in the Old. In essence it demonstrates a recognition of communion in the blessing of God. Jesus lays his hands on the children as a sign of the blessing which God communicates to them through him (see Mark 10:16). When he lays his hands on the sick, it is God's healing Spirit that flows through him (see Mark 6:5).

When Paul lays his hands upon a group of people who had just been baptised: 'the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke in tongues and prophesied' (Acts 19:6; see 8:14-17).

At other times hands were laid on people in recognition and acknowledgment of the fact that they have been chosen by Christ and endowed by his Spirit with gifts for special ministry in the community. When the church in Jerusalem recognised the need to provide for the Greek-speaking Christians, 'they had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them' (Acts 6:6). Similarly with Paul himself and Barnabas we read:

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

– Acts 13:2-3

So it was that one day, probably in Ephesus, words of prophecy were pronounced in the assembly (see 1:18), and the 'council of the elders' (*presbuterion*) laid hands on Timothy, recognising that Christ had chosen him and given him a special 'gift' (*charisma*) for leadership in the community. Paul is reminding them of this and of the obedience which they owe Timothy in spite of his youth.

Paul's final remark reminds us that though God does will that everyone be saved, and though all we need for salvation is offered us unconditionally through Jesus, salvation is a gift offered in love. Our receiving of it is conditioned upon our welcoming it in faith. There are people who say that once we have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Saviour we are assured of salvation. This statement needs to be interpreted with care.

It is true that we do not earn salvation by doing what the law commands. It is also true that genuine faith is more than an intellectual consent. It bears fruit in deeds; it is 'faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6). It is true that 'Christ has set us free', but it is essential that we 'stand firm and not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Galatians 5:1); that we 'do not use this freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence' (Galatians 5:13). If we fail in this we 'will not inherit the kingdom of God' (Galatians 5:21). To 'reap eternal life from the Spirit', it is necessary that we 'sow to the Spirit ... so let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time if we do not give up' (Galatians 6:8-9).

In his correspondence with the Thessalonians, Paul speaks of the pleasure it gave him when Timothy brought him 'the good news of your faith and love' (1Thess 3:6). However, he goes on to speak of the necessity of their 'continuing to stand firm in the Lord' (1Thess 3:8), and he goes on to give them many practical directions about the kind of lives that they must live if they are to be vindicated before God at the judgment. He also assures them that they can live good lives because God has given them his Holy Spirit (1Thess 4:8). He wants them to be 'blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this' (1Thess 5:24). He will do it, but we must welcome the grace we are offered and allow the Spirit to bear fruit in our lives.

In his second letter he warns them that 'those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord' (2Thess 1:8-9). There is nothing automatic about salvation, and so Paul adds: 'to this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith' (2Thess 1:11). We will not be saved if we 'refuse to love the truth' (2Thess 2:10). 'All who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned' (2Thess 2:12). The Christians of Thessalonica must 'stand fast and hold firm to the traditions that you were taught' (2Thess 2:15). They must not 'be weary in doing what is right' (2Thess 3:13).

Paul's teaching on salvation in these early letters is unambiguous. We find it repeated in all his subsequent writings. His First Letter to the Corinthians is typical. He refers to himself and his fellow believers as those who are 'being saved' (1Corinthians 1:18; 15:2). It is a process requiring constant vigilance, repentance and renewal of faith which welcomes grace and bears fruit in love. 'Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God' (1Cor 4:5). He is speaking to believers when he lists the kind of behaviour that 'will not inherit the kingdom of God' (1Cor 6:10). We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit; we have been 'bought at a price'; we must, therefore, glorify God in our bodies (1Cor 6:19-20). We must believe; we must 'lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you' (1Cor 7:17). We must not 'sin against Christ' (1Cor 8:12). Paul knew the cost of discipleship as he disciplined himself 'so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified' (1Corinthians 9:27). He warns the Corinthians: 'If you think you are standing watch out that you do not fall' (1Cor 10:12). The welcoming of what God offers in love requires of us that we heed Paul's words: 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:2).

¹Do not speak harshly to an older man, but appeal [NRSV ‘speak’] to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, ²to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters — with absolute purity.

³Honour widows who are really widows.

⁴If a widow has children or grandchildren, they should first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some repayment to their parents; for this is pleasing in God’s sight.

⁵The real widow, left alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; ⁶but the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.

⁷Give these commands as well, so that they may be above reproach. ⁸And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Timothy’s position requires that he exercise authority over the older men in matters concerning church organisation and life. His youth (see 4:12) could make this difficult at times since it goes against normal cultural expectations. Paul reminds him that he is to mediate Christ’s appeal to them. See the reflection on *parakaleō* in the commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:12. The obvious difficulties that can arise when a young man is dealing with younger women call forth from Paul a special insistence on the necessity of absolute ‘purity’ (*hagneia*, 4:12) – a word used for respecting (not intruding on) sacred space.

After these brief statements about how Timothy should relate to the different age-groups in the community, Paul addresses a problem that has arisen in the matter of the community supporting its widows. The resources of the community are being drained because some families are failing to carry out their responsibility and are leaving it to the community. Paul reminds such families that it is pleasing in God’s sight when they acknowledge their debt to the widows and care properly for them. The community’s support is to be kept for ‘real widows’, that is, for those who are ‘left alone’, with no family to supply their needs.

Paul takes the occasion to offer advice to these widows. They have no one on whom they can rely. Let them set their hopes on God (who will care for them through the community). After the busyness of life, they have the opportunity now to concentrate on prayer. They must not fritter away this precious time in living for pleasure. That is to be ‘dead even while she lives’.

After this small digression, Paul returns to the subject of families looking after their own widows. He has just said how pleasing it is to God. His words now are much stronger. To neglect such a responsibility is to ‘deny the faith’. It is to behave in a way that is ‘worse than unbelievers’. It would also, no doubt, harm the reputation of the church and its mission.

Paul now describes the widows who should be officially inscribed on the list of those to be supported. They are to be ‘not less than sixty’. He will explain his reasons for excluding younger widows shortly. As with the bishops (see 3:2), they are to be examples to the community of the special fidelity that is to be between Christ and the church (see the commentary on Titus 1:6). They are also to be people who are known to have lived exemplary Christian lives in the way described in verse ten. Of course, Paul is not saying that other needy widows are to be neglected. We are dealing here with what seems to have been a public institution in the community.

Paul now turns to the second abuse, and it concerns younger widows. In keeping with what Paul has already said about widows being ‘married only once’ (5:9), it seems that a pledge of chastity was made on the occasion of being placed on the list of widows approved for support. Younger widows were tempted to break this pledge. There was also the problem that some of them were enjoying their subsidised leisure and were abusing it. Some may have been influenced by the false teachers (see 2:15; 4:3) and were refusing marriage on principle. Paul does not want the church to be subsidising their irresponsible behaviour. They should not be accepted among the approved widows, but should remarry, live responsible lives, and stop giving the Christian community a bad name.

Paul concludes by returning to the responsibility of families to care for their own widows where possible. This will free up the resources of the community for those who really need them.

⁹Let a widow be put on the list if she is not less than sixty years old and has been married only once;

¹⁰she must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints’ feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.

¹¹But refuse to put younger widows on the list; for when their sensual desires alienate them from Christ, they want to marry, ¹²and so they incur condemnation for having violated their first pledge.

¹³Besides that, they learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say.

¹⁴So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, and manage their households, so as to give the adversary no occasion to revile us. ¹⁵For some have already turned away to follow Satan.

¹⁶If any believing woman has relatives who are really widows, let her assist them; let the church not be burdened, so that it can assist those who are real widows.

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching;

¹⁸for the scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain’ (Deuteronomy 25:4), and, ‘The labourer deserves to be paid’ (Luke 10:7).

¹⁹Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15).

²⁰As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear.

²¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality.

Paul turns his attention here to the ‘elders’. Following the Jewish model of community organisation, they seem to have formed a council (see 4:14) which was responsible for the direction of the local community. The community should give special recognition to those who ‘rule well’ (Greek: *proistēmi*, compare 1Thessalonians 5:12; Romans 12:8). In keeping with the main theme of this letter which concerns the necessity of ‘sound teaching’ (1:10), Paul is especially interested in those elders who ‘labour in preaching and teaching’. The community should show its appreciation in some tangible form, according to the instructions of the sacred Scripture. Having quoted from Deuteronomy (compare 1Corinthians 9:9), Paul adds a saying of Jesus as included in his Gospel by Luke. The close association of Paul and Luke could well mean that Paul learned this from Luke.

On the Jewish model, the council of elders was probably responsible for settling disputes that arose within the community. If so, this would give special importance to Paul’s instruction concerning care in dealing with accusations brought against them. They needed to be protected against false accusations. At the same time if they are guilty of public sin, and, in spite of correction, persist in it, they should be publicly disciplined for the good of the whole community. There are echoes here of the process outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 (see also 1Corinthians 5:4-5).

Paul concludes this set of instructions in an especially solemn way. The inclusion of the ‘angels’ is possibly due either to their association with the assembly (see 1Corinthians 11:2) or to their association with divine judgment (see 2Thessalonians 1:7). Timothy must avoid prejudice in the exercise of his authority, and he must take care to be even-handed in his dealings with the community.

Paul spoke earlier of the time when the elders laid hands on Timothy (see 4:14 and the commentary). He now instructs Timothy to discern well before he gives authoritative approval to those being presented for public ministry in the church. If through sinning they prove unsuitable, he must bear some of the responsibility. He is to keep himself 'pure' (*hagnos*, see 5:2).

From Paul's instructions that a bishop must not be 'a drunkard' (3:3), and that deacons must not be 'indulging in much wine' (3:8), we can deduce that overindulgence in the drinking of wine must have been a problem in Ephesus. We should understand that the water in cities at the time was often unsafe for drinking and was known to cause 'frequent ailments'. Perhaps Timothy's decision to abstain altogether from drinking wine may have been motivated by the scandal caused by church leaders in this matter. Timothy may be over-scrupulous in not wanting to contribute to the sin of those who are over-indulging. In restricting his drinking to water he was endangering his health.

In verses twenty-four and twenty-five he returns to the subject of Timothy's authorising of church ministers. He does not want him to be over-scrupulous. It is inevitable that he make some mistakes. Some people's sins are not conspicuous. He is not to blame if he fails to pick this up and the sins are revealed only later. It is the same with people's good points. Some of these will emerge only later. Timothy's duty is to make the best discernment he can on the evidence available to him.

²²Do not lay hands on [NRSV 'ordain'] anyone hastily, and do not participate in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

²³No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

²⁴The sins of some people are conspicuous and precede them to judgment, while the sins of others follow them there.

²⁵So also good works are conspicuous; and even when they are not, they cannot remain hidden.

¹Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed.

²Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved.

As noted when commenting on the parallel passage in Titus 2:9-10, domestic slavery was part of social life in the Roman, Greek and Jewish world. We have had occasion to reflect upon Paul's attitude towards it in commenting on 1Corinthians 7:1, in introducing his Letter to Philemon, and in the commentary on Colossians 4:1 and Ephesians 6:5-9. Two considerations underlie Paul's remarks here. The first is that while it is true that Christian slaves, like other slaves, are 'under the yoke of slavery', they are also under another 'yoke', that of him who said:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

– Matthew 11:28-30

The second consideration is that all those who share in Jesus' communion of love with the Father are living a life that transcends the social inequalities that are part of our existence in the world:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

– Galatians 3:28 (see Colossians 3:11)

Both these considerations must radically transform all our social relationships, including slavery, but there was no possibility of a small Christian community altering such a fundamental institution in society generally. Furthermore, the institution was so much taken for granted that it persisted even in Christian households. Change would come about only by changing people's attitudes and perceptions. The behaviour of Christian slaves has a role to play in bringing about this change, and it is this that is Paul's concern here.

The freedom given to them in the Christian church should make their behaviour all the more attractive to their masters. Otherwise, since they claim to be Christians, they will cause their masters to think ill of Christ and so 'blaspheme'. We recall Paul's quoting of Isaiah in his Letter to the Romans; 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you' (Romans 2:24; Isaiah 52:5). Though he does not explicitly say it here, Paul is obviously hoping that they will attract their masters to the faith.

If their masters are Christians, this is all the more reason to fulfil their duties in a Christian manner. Since they are serving those who loved by God and by Christ, they, too, should serve in love.

It has been clear from the outset that Paul's main concern in writing this letter is to strengthen the church against those who are undermining it by 'teaching different doctrine' (*heterodidaskaleō*, 1:3), or, as the same Greek verb is translated here, 'teaching otherwise'. In his first reference to them he spoke of them as turning aside from 'a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith'(1:5), and so from 'love'. They fail to understand 'either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions'(1:7). Later he referred to them as being under demonic influence, and as being hypocrites and liars (see 4:1-2). He continues his critique here. The key problem is that their teaching is not in accord with the healing, life-giving words of Christ. The genitive construction embraces the words spoken *by* Jesus, before his death as well as through his Spirit, as well as the proclamation of the gospel which speaks *about* him as well as being inspired *by* him. Only teaching that focuses on Christ leads to communion with the living God. We looked at Paul's use of 'godliness'(*eusebeia*) in the commentary on Titus 1:1.

Whoever teaches otherwise is described by Paul as 'conceited' (*tuphoō*), in the sense of being unable to think clearly because they are blown about and deafened by their own impulsive ideas. Paul has already instructed Timothy to make sure that such people are not given authority in the community (see 3:6). He echoes what he said earlier about their lack of understanding. Their 'craving for controversy and for disputes about words' is 'morbid'(*noseō*, 'sick craving'). Paul goes on to describe what happens when such teachers influence a community. These are some of the problems that have motivated Paul to write. They are vices that cut at the heart of community love. He begins the list with 'envy'(see also Titus 3:3). This also features in the list of vices in Galatians 5:21 and Romans 1:29. Envy leads to 'dissension' (also in Titus 3:9, Romans 1:29 and Galatians 5:20). Where there is dissension there is 'slander, base suspicions, and wrangling'. Their thinking has been corrupted. They have fallen for a fraud and are 'bereft of the truth'. The tragedy of this is heightened by what Paul has already said about God willing everyone to be saved and to come to 'the knowledge of the truth'(2:4). His critique comes to a climax with a topic that will engage him for much of the rest of the letter, for he sees it as being central to the problem. The false teachers are playing on people's religious sensibilities and are using religion as a way of making money.

^{2b}Teach and urge these duties.

³Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness

⁴is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words.

From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions,

⁵and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth,

imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment;

⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it;

⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be pleased [NRSV 'content'] with these.

⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil,

and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Paul agrees that there is great value in godliness (see 4:8), but not the kind that the false teachers are seeking. As he wrote earlier, the goal of sound teaching is 'love' (1:5), and what more valuable than to experience the love of God that is Christ's gift to us! As against the acquisitiveness of those who are contradicting the gospel for their own material gain, Paul speaks of 'contentment' (*auarcheia*). Here we have yet another attempt by Paul to reach across to the best in his culture to attract his contemporaries to the fullness of the Gospel which he has been commissioned to proclaim. *auarcheia* was highly recommended by the proponents of the major philosophical schools of the day, including the Stoics, the Epicureans and the Cynics. They understood it as 'self-sufficiency', whereby people found contentment in themselves and did not need other people or anything outside themselves to be complete. Paul could say of himself: 'I have learned to be *content* with whatever I have' (Philippians 4:11), not, however, because he was sufficient *in himself*, but because he had all he needed in Christ. His 'contentment' allows him to say, in a very unstoic way:

I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

– 2Corinthians 12:9

Paul's statement in verse nine echoes Jesus' words: 'I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear; your Father knows that you need them' (Luke 12:22,30). His words about the seductive nature of material wealth also echo the words of Jesus:

None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

– Luke 14:33

Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

– Luke 18:25

Desire for wealth has led many to be 'trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction'. It has caused some to abandon the faith, and, since the desire can never be satisfied, it has led to the anxieties that come with unfulfillable desire.

Most of the instructions which Paul has given to Timothy in this letter have been indirectly aimed at the community, especially those in leadership positions. These final words are for Timothy. He is to pursue 'righteousness' (*dikaïosunē*, see the commentary on Galatians 2:16) and 'godliness' (*eusebeia*, see the commentary on Titus 1:1). They are necessarily connected. Through the gift of righteousness, we share in Jesus' relationship to God. The result is a life in which we live in the presence of the living and true God, the God of the Exodus and the God of Jesus. We listen to God's word and let God's will be expressed in all our activity. 'Faith, love and endurance' were listed together in Titus 2:2 (see the commentary). 'Gentleness' (*praïpathia*) is found only here in the Greek Bible. It is related to *praütēs* (see Titus 3:2).

The 'fight' metaphor (repeated from 1:18) comes either from the stadium (see 4:10) or the battlefield. The prize is 'eternal life' (1:16). The confession to which Paul refers may be the confession of faith which Timothy made when he was given his present commission (1:18; 4:14). Paul solemnly enjoins upon him that he is to be faithful with the faithfulness of Christ. It is this commission, elements of which Paul has been stressing in this letter, which is the commandment which Timothy is to keep 'without spot'.

Paul invites Timothy to contemplate and look forward to the 'manifestation' of Christ (*epiphaneia*; see Titus 2:11), which God will bring about 'at the right time' (see 2:6).

The concluding solemn doxology may be a quotation from synagogue worship.

¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this;

**pursue righteousness,
godliness,
faith,
love,
endurance,
gentleness.**

¹²Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

¹³In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will bring about at the right time —

**he who is the blessed
and only Sovereign,
the King of kings
and Lord of lords.**

**¹⁶It is he alone
who has immortality
and dwells in unapproachable light,
whom no one has ever seen
or can see;
to him be honour
and eternal dominion.
Amen.**

¹⁷As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

**¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,
¹⁹ thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.**

²⁰Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge;

²¹by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith.

Grace be with you.

The fact that Paul returns here to the subject of wealth is an indication that it was a significant part of the problem that lay behind the erroneous teaching that has been central to his concern throughout the letter. It picks up from the points he was making in 6:3-10, before he broke off to address some personal exhortations to Timothy. We recall also his criticisms of the women who were displaying their wealth in the assembly (2:9), his concern that bishops (3:3) and deacons (3:8) not be lovers of, or greedy for, money. Also his criticism of widows who were 'living for pleasure' (5:6).

Paul is anxious that those in the community who are wealthy are not seduced into pride or into finding their security in their material possessions. The passing nature of material possessions is accented by Paul when he speaks of these people as being rich 'in this present age'. Everything is passing except God. We must put our trust in 'God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment'. Paul is echoing the warning of the psalmist: 'See the one who would not take refuge in God, but trusted in abundant riches, and sought refuge in wealth!' (Psalm 52:7).

Wealth is something that gives us the opportunity 'to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share'. We are not to be like those of whom Jesus speaks, who 'store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God' (Luke 12:21). The wealthy must not let material possessions distract them from taking hold 'of the life that really is life'. There are echoes in Paul's words of the advice given by Jesus, though Paul does not define wealth as 'dishonest':

I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone, they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

– Luke 16:9

After once again urging Timothy to 'guard what has been entrusted to you' – the community entrusted to his care, and the gospel which he is commissioned to proclaim – Paul speaks again of the emptiness and the danger to the faith of the heterodox teaching that Timothy must do all he can to stamp out. He concludes this formal, apostolic letter with a prayer that God's grace will be with the community. The plural 'you' is a further indication that this is not conceived as a personal letter to Timothy, but is meant for the church. Paul has assured them that Timothy is acting under Paul's instructions, and he wants him to be obeyed.